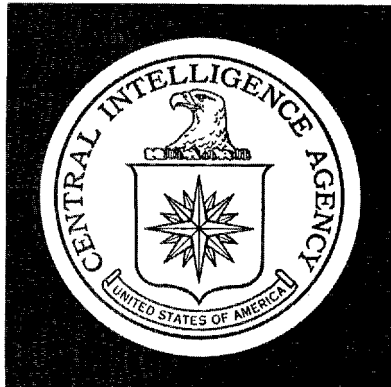


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India: Prime Minister Gandhi's position in the government has been further weakened as a result of her inept handling of the Czechoslovak issue.

India's decision to abstain on last week's UN Security Council vote to condemn Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia was roundly criticized throughout India. The decision also led to pandemonium in subsequent sessions of the Indian Parliament and a protest walkout by the entire non-Communist opposition. One Cabinet minister resigned in opposition to the government's refusal to adopt a tougher line against Soviet intervention.

More important for Mrs. Gandhi's future is the reported growing lack of confidence in her leadership on the part of senior Congress Party leaders. These leaders have been reluctant to precipitate an intraparty struggle by moving to force Mrs. Gandhi out and have lacked an appropriate issue on which to challenge her. Her handling of the Czechoslovak problem may have presented the party leaders with a vehicle for her ouster. Ambassador Bowles reports that she may be seriously challenged at a Congress Party working committee meeting later this week.

A move to replace Mrs. Gandhi presumably would not be attempted unless the long-standing problem of agreeing on a successor had been overcome by Congress Party leaders. The most logical candidate to succeed her would be Deputy Prime Minister Desai,

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